

Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science

Lietuvių Katalikų Mokslo Akademija

Boston Public Library Trustees (BPL)
Mr. Jeffrey B. Rudman, *Chairman*
700 Boylston St.
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. J.B. Rudman and fellow BPL Trustees,

January 22, 2013

My name is Jonas A. Stundzia. I am a member of the board of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science (Lietuvių Katalikų Mokslo Akademija). I had recently visited the Copley BPL to borrow several Lithuanian books, only to find that the Lithuanian collection had been liquidated, along with the Latvian and Estonian collections. For our nationality this is a very sensitive matter. Historically Lithuania had suffered under the Tsarist outlawing of our printed word, and later the Soviet Union occupation eradicated many of our books and tried to alter our history and culture.

Of the approximate 500 plus Lithuanian books in the BPL collection, most of them were donated by our Lithuanian intelligentsia. These were books on linguistics, philology of the proto indo-european theories, literature, art, classical novels and folklore studies. Several were very rare books, such as gold medal recipients from the Paris World Exhibit in 1900, when the Lithuanian language was still outlawed in the homeland.

In 1977, I participated in a great debate sponsored by the Lithuanian National Guard in Exile, here in Boston. The discussion was about public vs. private collections of important national heritage books. In its conclusion, it was felt that in the west, there was a stronger respect for the first amendment and that such collections would not fall to purges in prestigious libraries like the BPL.

In the BPL's "World Languages Department" we understand that collections are kept in circulation according to both social demographics and anticipated future demand. No matter what the circumstances, a complete collection should never be eliminated. Just the quality of many of the books should have been a red flag that a review of the reading material should have been conducted. These were books of a high scholastic level, not Harlequin romance novels. In the Boston telephone book alone, there are four Lithuanian institutions listed. They could have been contacted, very easily, for assistance. Then, the most important books could have been selected for the BPL reference department.

Another important point is that there was no itemized documentation of the liquidated collection. In the future there will be no reference to the Lithuanians, Latvians or Estonians, who they were as ethnic communities in Boston's multi-cultural heritage, or what they found important for literature. It will be as if they never existed. By the push of the "Delete" button, their record no longer existed. Do you see how strange that only the smallest and most vulnerable nationalities were eliminated at the BPL? We know very well if this was done to the Irish-Gaelic or the Hebrew collections, the social and political wrath of those communities would fall upon you. We Lithuanians are very sensitive to the ethnic identity of all nationalities; no one should suffer such a plight.

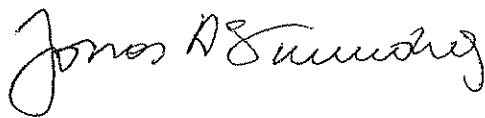
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Amongst the Baltic people, books are very precious. It is very painful to think that our heritage was taken away in this fashion. The Lithuanian nation in exile, is the only nationality that ever published a 36 volume encyclopedia during the Soviet occupation, and we are proud to say it was done in Boston, Massachusetts. Throughout the world, amongst Lithuanians, when you say Boston, everyone acknowledges this incredible milestone. That is why it is so hard for us to fathom that, in such a prestigious library like the Boston Public, such a fate could fall upon us.

I spoke to the staff, and as I understand, the books were sold off on line. The rare books of Mr. Buga and Basanavicius have been lost to our community. When I came back the following week, a single small book of 50 pages, featuring the letters of the great composer Churlionis, that had been mis-shelved had been returned to its original place. It was very symbolic, like during the Soviet occupation and massacres, when a single orphan returned to his village only to find everyone killed off.

I would like to discuss this matter with you and the possibility of re-establishing a Lithuanian collection, maybe in the reference department. I hope you understand the deep pain that we feel.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jonas A. Stundzia".

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cc: Latvian Community of Boston
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cc: Lietuvos Mokslo Akademija, Vilnius, Lithuania